

Don't give up!

The context to our parable today is about the coming Kingdom. This was a burning question amongst the Jews of Jesus' time – when would the Kingdom come and Jesus' response is that the Kingdom has already come. It is within you. Luke 17 v20

Think about that, the Kingdom of God is within you.

So to take this a step further, Jesus elaborates with the beautiful story of the persistent widow.

This is a powerful little story because the widow has no power.

She is a vulnerable woman, who needs help from a corrupt man. She needs someone to advocate for her.

This powerful judge holds the fate of this woman in his hands. An injustice had been committed and her only way out was the through the hands of this unjust judge. What are the chances of justice?

Now the point of this story is that Jesus is comparing God to the unjust judge and he is in fact saying that God has the power and authority to change things, the power to tackle injustice, but of course God is nothing like the unscrupulous judge, God is merciful ⁷ And will not God bring about justice for his chosen ones, who cry out to him day and night? Will he keep putting them off? ⁸ I tell you, he will see that they get justice, and quickly”

So this is a parable that helps us to understand that the Kingdom of God is within even the weakest and most vulnerable person who submits their life to God. God is on their side!

We know how this story typically plays out. Powerful people in our world, don't tend to give up that power or fight for the vulnerable unless it directly benefits them. The judge in this story does what we would expect.

He continues to deny her justice. Jesus inspires his hearers by telling them that she doesn't give up. She keeps coming to the judge – she is persistent! Over and over and over again. Eventually, she wears the judge down. He gets so tired of hearing her case that he relents and gives her justice.

In the times of Jesus women had no status. There was a programme on TV on Thursday evening about the status of women in Qatar. Well, this is not new! In Jesus' time women were considered to be the lowest class.

The judge was a prominent person – a key person in the community for upholding law and order. Someone who had the power to make decisions to change lives. She knew this, and so she came to his door daily; boldly pleading her case.

The widow in this parable functions as a model for persistent prayer. She goes before the unjust judge with her petition over and over, not taking no for an answer. She was resilient and eventually the judge gave her a hearing and granted her a pardon.

Note how the judge deals with her: “Though I neither fear God nor respect man, yet because this widow keeps bothering me, I will give her justice so that she will not beat me down by her continual coming” (Luke 18:5).

I believe that Jesus told this parable with a twinkle in his eyes – the unlikely circumstances of a widow brow-beating a judge!

Jesus tells us that if this wicked judge finally gives justice, what do you think a loving Father, who delights in giving the kingdom (Luke 12:32), will do for his children who cry out day and night? Will he not give justice speedily?

Luke tells us specifically in v1: that *“They should always pray and not give up.”*

And verse 8, Jesus asks the penetrating question, *“When the Son of Man comes, will he find faith on the earth?”* This parable then, is about not giving up, and trusting that God's Kingdom of justice is here and now.

Another point of the parable is to say how much more should we be persistent in pleading for justice with a God who delights to give justice and mercy?

The God that we worship; the God that we follow is merciful and gracious.

He has placed his Kingdom within our hearts and that means that he is King of our lives.

Prayer can feel so inactive but prayer can change situations for we invite God into the situation.

You don't go alone – God enters into your lives and into your hardship.

He gives us the privilege of being in our lives and in our hearts.

In a few moments we are coming to reflect upon his sacrifice for us all and unlike the unscrupulous judge, he is gracious and generous. We did not ask him to go to the cross for our sins. He went because he loves us.

God is our judge, who stepped out of his bench, and has come down beside us and takes our place. That's the God that we trust and the God that Jesus has revealed to us.

In Paul's great letter to the Romans, he writes, *There is no condemnation for those in Christ Jesus.*

Charles Wesley summed it up, in the words of his great hymn, *O for a thousand tongues*

4. He breaks the power of cancell'd sin,

He sets the prisoner free:

His blood can make the foulest clean:

His blood avail'd for me.

These words speak of what the judge of all humanity has done for you and me. He has entered into our world as judge but as kind and gracious judge, who takes our place and sets us free.

Let us be like the persistent widow who knows that justice will only come from this one source, and so she keeps pleading until it happens. Likewise, we know that our only rescue is from the hand of the Lord.

Jesus tells them this parable is to encourage them to keep praying and not lose heart. Don't be discouraged. Don't be dejected. Don't give in to cynicism; or bitterness; or be overcome with negativity. Keep on hoping and trusting that God will be our liberator.

God hears your prayers and he knows your heart and if you are his child, then simply reach out and hold his hand.

Always remember the words of the psalmist, psalm 103 – whenever you are going through a lonely and dark time.

"His ways are not our ways,

The Lord is compassionate and gracious,

slow to anger, abounding in love.

⁹ *He will not always accuse,*

nor will he harbour his anger forever;

¹⁰ *he does not treat us as our sins deserve*

or repay us according to our iniquities.

¹¹ *For as high as the Heavens are above the earth,*

so great is his love for those who fear him;

¹² *as far as the east is from the west,*

so far has he removed our transgressions from us.

¹³ *As a father has compassion on his children,*

so the Lord has compassion on those who fear him;

¹⁴ *for he knows how we are formed,*

he remembers that we are dust.

¹⁵ *The life of mortals is like grass,*

they flourish like a flower of the field;

¹⁶ *the wind blows over it and it is gone,*

and its place remembers it no more.

¹⁷ *But from everlasting to everlasting*

the Lord's love is with those who fear him,

and his righteousness with their children's children—

¹⁸ *with those who keep his covenant*

and remember to obey his precepts.

¹⁹ *The Lord has established his throne in Heaven,*

and his kingdom rules over all.

So today we come to share in communion.

As we do, let us focus on the grace and generosity of our generous God. Focus on the cross of Christ. Focus on his sacrifice, his blood shed for the forgiveness of sins and his body broken for you.

He did it for you.

He left Heaven to come to earth to die on a cross for you and me.

When we take communion we are part of this great event that happened 2000 years ago, we are one with him and by faith we draw near to him.

Receive his grace today.

Know your sins forgiven; know his peace in your lives and rejoice that the judge we have is not unscrupulous but he overflows with generosity and love.

Amen.